

VZCZCXYZ0016
PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHNR #2594/01 1650309
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 140309Z JUN 06
FM AMEMBASSY NAIROBI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2408
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 6962
RUEHDS/AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA 8591
RUEHBS/AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS 1701
RUEHRO/AMEMBASSY ROME 4954
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 3967
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC

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USUN FOR EMALY
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ROME FOR FODAG
GENEVA FOR NKYLOH
NSC FOR TSHORTLEY

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [EAID](#) [SO](#)

SUBJECT: VIOLENCE IN MOGADISHU EXACERBATES
HUMANITARIAN CRISIS IN CENTRAL AND SOUTHERN SOMALIA

Summary

1. In May 2006, an ongoing low-intensity conflict between warlords and factions aligned with the Islamic courts in the Somali capital of Mogadishu escalated into large-scale violence throughout the city. On June 5, the Islamic Court Union (ICU) claimed control of Mogadishu, with most of the warlords reportedly fleeing to neighboring areas. The security situation in Mogadishu remains precarious and aid agencies are concerned that the violence threatens to spread to neighboring towns. As the situation continues to evolve, relief organizations are providing urgently needed emergency assistance to residents already reeling from the combined effects of drought, food insecurity, and political instability. USAID/OFDA staff are actively engaging with UN and NGO partners to monitor conditions and support humanitarian efforts. End Summary.

Background

2. Following the collapse of the Siad Barre government in 1991, a system of sharia-based Islamic courts emerged as the main judicial system in Mogadishu. Funded through fees paid by litigants and international Islamic charities, the Islamic courts began to offer other services, including education, health care, and law enforcement. Bringing some stability to Mogadishu, the courts gained support among some local businesses and residents over time. In 1999, supporters of the Islamic courts united to form the Islamic Court Union (ICU). However, as the ICU began to assert legal authority, it came into conflict with powerful warlords who had controlled most of the city since 1991.

¶3. Armed clashes began to break out between the two factions and in February 2006, a group of Mogadishu warlords formed the Alliance for the Restoration of Peace and Counter-Terrorism (ARPCT), in reaction to the growing power of the ICU. The ARPCT is an alliance of businessmen and warlords, four of whom were ministers in the transitional federal government (TFG) of Somalia. In May, the sporadic clashes between the ICU and ARPCT escalated and the fighting expanded to new areas of the city.

¶4. On June 5, the ICU claimed control of Mogadishu, defeating the ARPCT, which fled the city north to Jowhar. On June 6, the ICU stated that they were in control of areas up to 100 km from Mogadishu. Territory reportedly under the ICU's control includes the important town of Balaad. Approximately 50 km from Mogadishu, Balaad is on the main access and trade route to Somalia's northern and central regions. According to media reports, the ICU has control of much of the weaponry in the region, which makes a resurgence by the warlords difficult without external support.

¶5. As a result of the violence, OCHA reports that residents of Mogadishu have fled to nearby towns, including Jowhar and Balaad. However, on June 7, media sources reported that residents of Jowhar who were able, were fleeing the town or arming themselves in anticipation of the conflict spreading to the area. According to the UN Department of Safety and Security, as of June 7, the remnants of the ARPCT's militia were positioned approximately 6 km outside of town off the main Mogadishu road while the ICU militia were reported to be 18 km outside of Jowhar.

¶6. The only other significant authority in central Somalia is the TFG. Formed in Kenya in 2004, the TFG Parliament met in Somalia for the first time on February 26, and is presently based in Baidoa, 250 km north of Mogadishu. With the loss of the ARPCT's control of Mogadishu, the four warlords who were ministers in the TFG were expelled from their cabinet posts. Interim Prime Minister Ali Mohammed Ghedi has stated an interest in meeting with ICU leaders. On June 12, the TFG-appointed Mayor of Mogadishu traveled to Nairobi to meet with a broad range of aid organizations and to appeal for international assistance in response to the situation.

Impact on Humanitarian Situation

¶7. Although figures cannot be verified, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) estimates that clashes between the ICU and ARPCT have led to more than 330 deaths, 1,700 people injured, and 18,000 people becoming internally displaced since January. As the violence escalated in May and June, fighting expanded from the northern part of the city to southern and eastern areas, further limiting residents' options to escape hostilities.

¶8. Of particular concern are the 250,000 conflict-affected internally displaced persons (IDPs) concentrated in southern Mogadishu since the early 1990s. Primarily members of minority groups that perform menial jobs, these IDPs lack the traditional clan support available to other residents of the city. Additionally, intermittent closure of roads from Mogadishu to the southern regions as a result of the violence has disrupted trade links and the import of food from the Shabelle Valley into the city. IDPs normally buy fruits and vegetables from the Shabelle Valley to sell in Mogadishu and this livelihood activity has been curtailed.

¶9. The USAID-supported Famine Early Warning System Network (FEWS NET) reports that the Balaad-Jowhar-

Hiraan road was also closed during the fighting, cutting off the main route between Mogadishu and the central regions and delaying transport of commodities. In addition, there are numerous militia checkpoints along this road and FEWS NET reports militia groups looting goods transported in and out of the city. With the flow of goods disrupted, cereal prices in the areas outside Mogadishu have reached 200 percent of the normal level for this time of year, according to FEWS NET/Somalia.

¶10. On May 29, armed militia believed to be part of the ARPCT took over Keysaney Hospital in northern Mogadishu, which is supported by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the Somali Red Crescent Society (SRCS), causing the evacuation of patients and severely restricting medical services. Keysaney is one of only two hospitals in Mogadishu providing free services, and one of three hospitals offering surgical services for war wounded. The occupation has been condemned by the UN Under Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs as a violation of humanitarian law. As of June 8, armed militia continue to occupy Keysaney, but services have resumed.

¶11. Presently, the measles vaccination campaign scheduled to take place in Mogadishu has been suspended

until the situation is calmer. UNICEF reports that the measles campaigns outside of Mogadishu are on schedule. In Lower Shabelle, which is hosting a number of IDPs from Mogadishu, the measles campaign began on May 29. The polio campaign in Mogadishu commenced on June 11 as adequate supplies are already in the city.

Contingency Planning by Aid Agencies in Mogadishu

¶12. Agencies working in Mogadishu include Action Contre la Faim (ACF), Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF), ICRC, SRCS, numerous local NGOs, OCHA, UNICEF, and WFP. Presently, aid organizations in Mogadishu and surrounding areas have been able to maintain humanitarian operations despite the insecurity. OCHA has convened regular meetings to coordinate response strategies and develop contingency plans.

¶13. UN agencies are continuing current operations, while looking at options to strengthen and expand activities. The UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) is pre-positioning stocks to maintain health services and drug supplies. USAID/OFDA funds UNICEF to provide water, health, and nutrition support to the most vulnerable Somalis, including those affected by the latest humanitarian crisis in Mogadishu. The UN World Food Program (WFP) has made initial planning for air drops of food to rural areas if the situation deteriorates further and ground transport becomes unavailable.

¶14. The UN Logistics Cluster is reviewing alternative routes for access to Mogadishu in the event that ports are affected. During the UN Logistics Cluster meeting on June 6, participants concluded that no logistical difficulties have been experienced so far. On and off-loading of cargo and transport have continued despite ongoing fighting. Almost all agencies are operating through contractors who negotiate for passage with the warring parties and alternative logistics routes are identified by or with contractors. While agencies did not expect transport of humanitarian aid to be impeded directly, intensified fighting may result in temporary access or movement problems, increase in road blocks and rates paid, and hikes in fuel prices. The fighting may also affect trade, resulting in price increases on commodities and transport.

¶15. According to USAID/OFDA-funded partner World Concern, fighting in Mogadishu has not had a noticeable impact on project activities in Middle Shabelle Region.

However, World Concern has observed a recent influx of people from Mogadishu to Juba Valley, especially Jilib town.

¶16. Furthermore, agencies are concerned that the humanitarian situation in Mogadishu and neighboring areas already hit hard by the drought emergency, may deteriorate further if the violence continues or expands to surrounding areas. UNICEF is particularly concerned about the conflict spreading to Jowhar, which is the main hub of UNICEF operations in the region. UNICEF has relocated staff from Jowhar as a security precaution. As of May 31, UNICEF confirmed that 217 families had arrived in Jowhar from Mogadishu and were being hosted by community members. According to UNICEF, water is not a problem thus far as Jowhar town is well served. However, individual households may face food shortages as residents try to accommodate new arrivals.

¶17. In Balaad, UNICEF is supporting hygiene and sanitation, and extension and rehabilitation of the water system. In addition, HIV/AIDS awareness campaigns are planned. Additional staff have deployed to Balaad to support cholera prevention activities and monitor the number of IDPs arriving from Mogadishu. The measles campaign in Balaad will start after the June 11 National Immunization Day.

Conclusion

¶18. As the security environment in Mogadishu remains fluid, it is still too early to assess what additional humanitarian needs may emerge. Aid organizations are developing contingency plans to respond as necessary. Updates on the security situation and the humanitarian impact of the fighting are highlighted and shared at all interagency working group and cluster meetings. USAID/OFDA is in daily contact with UN agencies on the general security and humanitarian situations in Mogadishu, surrounding regions, and Somalia in general. USAID/OFDA anticipates more substantive reports on the impact of this crisis to emerge as relative calm returns to Mogadishu. USAID/OFDA supports ongoing assistance for humanitarian activities and will continue to monitor the evolving situation.

BELLAMY